

Blue Thumb: Connecting Native Plant Growers with Buyers

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**Washington Conservation District and East Metro Water Resource Education Program
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2008 Focus Group Research: Landscaping for Water Conservation
Kay M. Qualley and Angie Hong

Goals of the Focus Groups

The focus group sessions sought to answer four main questions for the East Metro Water Resource Education Program partners: 1) What landscaping preferences do people have for their yards or those of their workplaces? 2) How many people have heard of raingardens or the Blue Thumb program? 3) How concerned are people about water quality issues? 4) What opinions do people have about raingardens and natural landscaping?

Contact Angie Hong (651-275-1136 x.35 or angie.hong@mnwcd.org) for transcripts and summaries from the individual focus groups, a copy of the power point presentation used during the focus groups and a power point presentation of the results.

Structure and Mechanics of the Focus Groups

1. The original goal for the number of people for each focus group was 6-8 people per session.¹ We planned to call upon individuals from the targeted group (“movers and shakers”) who are people who volunteer and live or work in these communities. We arranged to meet with 1-2 groups per city/area in the southern half of Washington County, MN. Based on preliminary research, it was suggested that we slightly overbook the number of people who confirm attendance, in case of last minute schedule changes.
2. Each focus group was 1.25 to 1.5 hours. Two staff members were used for each session, one to moderate and one to act as a recorder. The moderator introduced the topics, kept talkative individuals from overwhelming others, summarized ideas that had been presented and kept the topics flowing. The “recorder” made the arrangements for the focus groups, including site, refreshments and scheduling. Immediately prior to the focus group meeting, the recorder set up the meeting room chairs, table orientation, brochure tables and equipment. The recorder also obtained any necessary food, ice or beverages prior to the beginning of the meeting. At the start of the meeting, the recorder greeted participants and gave them nametags. During the meeting the recorder ran the tape recorder and also took notes.

¹ Krueger, Richard. Focus Groups: A practical Guide for Applied Research, 2nd edition. California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1994.

3. Participants received a packet of materials during the meeting, containing a raingarden book (value \$18). One of authors, Rusty Schmidt, is a landscape ecologist with the Washington Conservation District.
4. Participants received phone call reminders prior to the focus group sessions.
5. Focus group time choices offered were:
 - a) Saturday morning
 - b) Tuesday through Friday- late afternoon slot (4 or 5 p.m.).
 - c) Noon during the week.
 - d) Early morning during the week

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday noon were the most favorable time slots. No one would agree to a Saturday morning meeting (focus groups were held during the summer). Next least favorite was early in the morning. Only one person (total from over 100 calls) wanted this time slot. Later in the day was favored by a few respondents, but nobody could agree on what day or what hour constitutes “later”! They agreed that late in the day on Friday was not an appropriate time. Noon was the clear winner, but not Friday noon.

6. Meeting Time Length: 1.5 hours +was considered the minimal² acceptable focus group length. After our calls determined that the largest number of people would commit to a lunch break time period, participants were told that “an hour to an hour and fifteen minutes” time would be needed.
7. Amenities for Focus Group Participants: Lunch (sandwich, chips, desserts and cold beverages) was provided. Participants received a complimentary copy of the Blue Thumb Guide to Raingardens, valued at \$18, at the conclusion of the focus group.
8. Location: Woodbury and Cottage Grove Public Libraries.
9. A moderated session, which included a short power point presentation, was conducted based on a rough script (Appendix A). Discussion, ideas, brochures and website information were made available, concluding remarks of thanks were given and the meetings ended.
10. Information: At the end of each session, we handed out informational packets. The packets contained several *Blue Thumb* documents including a plant material guide for

² Krueger, Richard. Focus Groups: A practical Guide for Applied Research, 2nd edition. California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1994.

use in designing raingardens, a buckthorn eradication fact sheet and a selection of other native plant and water conservation informational pieces.

Focus Group Summaries

The first focus group was held on August 5, 2008, at the H. Stafford Library in Woodbury, Minnesota. There were 16 attendees. This was the smallest room per number of people, and had the liveliest discussions. Not everyone could be seated around the table; some were in a row of chairs behind the table. Less participation was noted from those seated in the chairs, but still, this was a very talkative group that interacted well with each other. Ideas were flowing and one hour and fifteen minutes was too short a time for this session.

The second focus group was held on August 7, 2008 at the Park Grove Library in Cottage Grove, MN. There were 5 attendees (several confirmed, but were no-shows). This was the smallest group, and the quietest. The room was very well equipped, but a bit large for the size of the group. The table width could also have been a factor.

The third focus group was held on August 14, 2008, also at the Park Grove Library in Cottage Grove, MN. There were 10 attendees. This was the perfect-sized group for this project-manageable, yet everyone was able to get their viewpoint across. The room was very well equipped, but a bit large for the size of the group. Again, a room and table that are overly large seem to inhibit discussion. A more intimate arrangement worked better in the first focus group meeting in Woodbury; people relaxed more quickly and spoke to each other and to the moderator.

Future: Next steps for the project

A) Additional focus groups may be conducted. Below are three possible approaches:

1. Targeted Individuals Focus Group Plan:

Follow up the first set of focus groups by using the same format of inviting “movers and shakers” from an assortment of industries, all of which have in common a record of community service/ volunteerism in the Southern half of Washington County. Add a second focus group in Woodbury (to balance the two focus groups which were conducted in Cottage Grove) with the same format; slide presentation and questions as the initial focus groups. Focus groups could also be conducted in another part of the county, using the same techniques, and compared with the results from the southern Washington County focus group results.

2. Random Individuals within a Targeted Geographic Area- Focus Group Plan

Alternately, set up focus groups based on geographic al distribution. For instance, the southern part of Washington County (Woodbury and south) could be divided into the area

subunits like: St. Paul Park-areas south of tracts; areas west of Jamaica Ave., but up to Hwy. 61; areas west of Jamaica Ave., north of 20/22; south of 22, west of 19; and last, east of 19, south of 100th, for instance.

Random individuals from these geographic areas would be sent a letter of explanation with the information that someone will be calling soon. Follow-up calls to these individuals to obtain a commitment to participate in focus groups would need to be done next. The goal is to obtain 10-12 committed individuals per focus group, or 36-48 total people for a set of 3-4 focus groups. Like the original focus groups held in July and August of 2008, it is best to have at least 14-16 commitments lined up prior to the focus group session, to make sure that “no shows” do not undermine the size and effectiveness of the group.

3. Impaired Lakes Focus Group Approach

This is a variation on the above (random individuals from a targeted geographic area) plan. Homeowners around specific lakes or ponds would be targeted for participation in the focus groups. Impaired water bodies such as Markgrafs, Colby, and Wilmes Lakes, could be targeted.

B) Landscape and Water Use Questionnaires could be used in the following ways:

1. Questionnaires are sent to Homeowners in targeted areas (see previous section). Response envelopes with pre-paid postage are included in the packet of materials.
2. Questionnaires (samples have already been developed) are sent to Businesses in southern Washington County. Response envelopes with pre-paid postage are included in the packet of materials.

The information on the questionnaires would be tabulated and compared with the focus group ideas and results from July/August, 2008.

Appendix A:

Sample Script for Focus Group Sessions

“The goal of this gathering is to learn more about people’s (Woodbury, Cottage Grove, Newport, and St. Paul Park residents’) existing landscaping at both work and home and determine landscape preferences. We would like to identify programs that will incorporate new sustainable landscaping techniques into our area which will help homeowners, businesses, schools and public entities improve water quality for local lakes and rivers.”

A. Questions:

1. Let’s begin by talking about your current yard. How big is it? Would you describe it as mostly natural or mostly cultivated? How much of your yard is lawn? Do you have many gardens? Trees?
2. What kinds of problems do you have with your yard? For example, do you have erosion or drainage issues?
3. Now, let’s talk about your “ideal yard.” What would it look like? Would it include trees? Gardens? Shrubs? Lawn? Flowers? Other?
4. Take a look at the following photos (Photos: Traditional yard with mostly lawn; several yards with native plantings and/or raingardens; and a small business (car wash) with naturalistic landscaping. Which do you prefer? Why? What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of each?
5. Let’s begin by talking about native plants. What do you think of when you hear the term “native plants”? What do you think the advantages and disadvantages are of using native plants instead of cultivated garden plants or turf grass? Would you consider planting native plants in your yard?
6. Why or why not? Here are a few photos of native plantings – which do you like/dislike and why?
7. Next, let’s talk about raingardens. How many of you know what a raingarden is? (Give definition – be sure to mention that they can be planted with native plants or horticultural cultivars). Would you consider planting a raingarden in your yard? Why or why not? Here are a few photos of raingardens – which do you like/dislike and why? What would be some of the barriers to planting native plants in your yard?

8. How about the water resources in your community? How do you use local lakes and rivers (fishing, swimming, walking, etc.)? Would you consider local water bodies to be clean? Do they have any problems? Is water quality a major concern for you?
9. There is a new program in the Twin Cities area called Blue Thumb – Planting for Clean Water. How many people have heard of this program? The goal of the program is to help people plant native gardens, raingardens and shoreline plantings to improve water quality in lakes and rivers and help recharge groundwater supplies.
10. Part of the goal of the Blue Thumb Program is to make it as easy as possible for people to plant native gardens, raingardens and shoreline plantings. Some of the services available include the web site (show screen shots of web pages), free site visits and cost-share grants. Which of these incentives do you think would be the most useful in helping you to plant native gardens or raingardens in your yard? What other incentives or assistance would you like to see available?
11. You can help us make the Blue Thumb program as attractive as possible to residents in your community. Here are some Blue Thumb promotional materials. What are your first impressions? Are they attractive? Easy to understand? What other materials would you find useful?
12. What clubs or organizations are you involved in? Where do you think we should go to promote the program? Who can you think of who might be interested in this program?
13. What are your thoughts, suggestions, ideas or questions?

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McKenzie-Mohr, Doug and Smith, William. Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing. Canada: New Society Publishers, 1999.

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http://www.bluthumb.org/media/images/native_gardens.jpg

Results from Blended Focus Groups August 2008

Blue Thumb Program or raingardens -have they ever heard of them?

Blue Thumb Program: total of two people have heard of it. A third person wondered it was part of the Conservation District

Raingardens: five people have heard of them. Two people could discuss them or their locations in the community: Cottage Grove Veterinary Clinic, I think it is, Mike Thrasher's place down towards Cub, they put in new parking lots, they put raingardens in and around their parking lot, so the runoff from their lot goes into a couple of smaller raingardens to handle some of that situation.

Soliciting comments about the Blue Thumb, native planting and water conservation informational pieces in their folders yielded many appreciative murmurs and the following comment: "Having to produce similar pieces, I know the kind of work that went into the pieces in this folder. They look great, very professional."

Concerns about water:

Runoff vs Percolating into the ground:

As we've cemented and asphalted in Cottage Grove and St. Paul Park with all the development -it's become a water runoff problem.

I'm concerned about the runoff issues, too. So, I'm interested in what's going on with this.

What about the I-94 runoff?

We are interested in the amount of water that comes from the north into Woodbury, not just our property, but what affects the whole property, or the whole community.

We spend too much time putting fertilizing on [*the lawn*]. I have really backed off on fertilizer. I'm sure some people are not happy with me because it is not the rich green, but we have to start thinking of future generations.

What is happening to the storm water right now? When my water runs down the street, where is it going?

I've heard a couple of things that people [*known to participant*] were mentioning about runoff concerns.

There is a lot of runoff, right past our house, straight down hill to the Mississippi and it's a lot of runoff, so I'm concerned about that.

A [*concern for*] water filtration starts along this vein and it is a good thing.

[*We need to*] take care...of dirty storm water that we are making ...

But it's [water runoff] a concern. I think we have to start addressing some of this, start becoming a little more eco-sensitive.

In St. Paul Park, we got interested in rain gardens in the first place to see if we could get rain gardens on the boulevard because we noticed that the City of St. Paul Park had done a little bit with that several years ago. They thought it would be really good before the water all ran down to the river [*Mississippi*] for the water to be absorbed by these rain gardens. It sounds like the city isn't ready to do that.

Water Quality Concerns (Drinking water and quality of bodies of water; value of water in our area):

I've heard a couple of things that people were mentioning about water quality concerns in recent years and drinking water quality

I'm interested in water quality.

I'm concerned about our drinking water quality issues

As a sportsman, somebody that actively seeks out large pieces of water to go fishing and scuba diving, water clarity is a big deal.

...with some of issues we have in high density urban environments, water is going to become the new oil. The fact that we are already legislating to protect the Great Lakes from regions that have overdrawn their water

supplies -this kind of concept [*water conservation*] has to be brought forward.

We take the water for granted in this part of the country.

I live in Newport now and we have a water softener, but we've not had concerns about the actual quality of the water.

I think our water is good. I think 3M got a bad rap on it

I know when my husband and I purchased our acres, in Cottage Grove, we wanted to [*do research about*] our concerns. Before we even signed the paperwork we decided, "Let's get everything tested to make sure" -because of all the controversy-what was going on at 3M. So we obviously had that all done, and it all came back fine. You always have concerns about that [*water quality*], I don't know a whole lot about wells, having them dug down even further.

Conserving water: quantity

We're just trying to be sensitive about not running the sprinklers all of the time, not watering during the sunny times of the day, that type of thing.

I was thinking that this [*meeting*] would be about how to conserve water because we are wasting way too much water.

...in the summer we are pumping way too much water.

I am very concerned for conserving water.

But I am concerned about what impact I am making on the overall community [*personal water use*].

We spend too much time watering the lawns.

I thought it was kind of ironic that as soon as they came out with these issues and raising prices for the amount of usage [*water for homes*] that the City of Woodbury would change the landscaping on Valley Creek Road and add a watering system to try to water grass instead of maybe plants that are natural to the area or something like that. So there are issues out there.

Water Use: Legislate, Reward or Assess?

Build it [*requirements for raingardens and water conservation*] into the [*building*] codes, otherwise the additional cost of doing it will prevent it from being used, especially in new development. You could do a property tax credit of \$100.

How expensive water is-if water bill goes up, big lawns will cost more!

Maybe you can cut water usage by penalties on your water bill.

Better yet, maybe you can create incentives on your water bill for those who plant raingardens. Like the credit for recycling on your garbage bill.

Drainage and Flooding Concerns:

People who have planted things into the city property who have obstructed the drainage [are causing flooding problems].

Flooding discussion in Woodbury.

I've noticed that Cottage Grove has done a fairly nice plan of having runoff ponds to address and direct the water through the community.

Barrier comments: The look of native plantings/raingardens around the community-not flowering all season/no color in spring/little color in fall/weedy/design plan not obvious or attractive/not manicured/look unkempt.

Moderator: If, for example, somebody were to say "Hey, since you like raingardens so much, why don't you put one in your yard?" What would you say to them, what are the barriers that would hold you back?

Money!

Someone to come help me take care of it!

See I agree with Justin on these detention ponds and things that are designed to catch the runoff from yards and that type of thing. It's almost like nobody

consulted anybody on what should be planted there because some of them look absolutely terrible.

I've seen some of these, that when blooming they look very nice, but when they aren't blooming they look pretty weedy. I think that's part of the problem, the in-betweens.

At first glance some look like they need to mow!

What... is this guy [landscape contractor hired to do work on a commercial site] doing, is he going to start his landscaping process someplace?" She [building owner] told me this was going to be a prairie and I said, "He's got a long way to go.

It [native plantings] kind of goes from looking great to looking like a weed bed, depending on what seasonal aspect you're dealing with, therein lies the conundrum of that landscaping.

A prairie garden in a residential setting is a harder one to sustain. Echinacea and Black-eyed Susans are showy, but not all of the plants are.

Participant: I think that when they [*wildflower areas*] have flowering of some sort it helps. This one [slide showing primarily native grasses] to me, Oh gosh, looks like more like a weed or something. Moderator: You mean like the "before picture"? [*Nods yes*]

One of the conflicts I see about water quality from an architect's standpoint (landscape architects may have another opinion), the water quality management ponds and the big rain garden they just put in, I mean [the look of the plantings] that is not a thing of beauty for many people.

All those other ones [*slides of native gardens, rain gardens*] had some kind of color in them, and that really helps. It doesn't necessarily have to be a lot, but maybe if there was just some or maybe there is some in there but the picture [*slide being shown of a field*] doesn't pick that up. It looks to me like some parts of it have some flowers, but it mostly looks like the slide [*of native grasses-little flowering color*]. What is that all about? To me it isn't adding to the environment or to that area. It's not

adding anything- it just looks like a lot of weeds, to me, as a resident. Like, what are you trying to do there?

They don't stay like that [referring to the blooming mid-summer photo slide].

What's your vision of a beautiful yard? What's your age, sex, do you garden, do you golf? How much do you need to have your yard conform to the look of your neighbor's yard? Neighborhood? Is it regulated by an association?

When I look at this and there are wildflowers then wow, it's ok, but not when it looks more like grass that hasn't been mowed with weeds. Then it's getting like "Oh, I can't see it!" It looks like a lot of weeds to me.

One of the things I see when I look at the residences [*raingardens and native plantings shown on slides*]-you have to get a whole neighborhood to buy into this -not individual people. If my neighbor planted his yard like that and I've got my nice green lawn, the guy right across the street does... I wouldn't be too happy with it. It isn't going to be a thing of beauty anymore. Also, it's looking very nice at the time these pictures are taken (slide has native summer blooming perennials on it) too, but you've got spring and fall.

Wedgewood was a brand new course here in Woodbury and it was very nicely developing, then somebody bought it out, and they let it go natural for two years and the first year it sounded like a good idea. But it looked like heck after two years and then all the residents around there put up a big stink. And now it's back to this manicured beautiful area. So, there's got to be some kind of balance... if you let that go and the weeds are there the next year and it's not maintained, it is an eyesore and most people won't want to tolerate or live next door to it.

Moderator: When you are looking at these [*raingardens*], what are you thinking? Participant: They're not manicured.

Especially around businesses, we don't think about the fact that they did it [used a native landscaping look] on purpose. We're so used to seeing the well-manicured areas.

You put something like that in where you wouldn't have neighbors behind you. It would have to be in an area where there is probably not a whole lot of traffic, too. You wouldn't put it all in your front yard. And like you said, to have somebody plant it, and then somebody else has a well-groomed yard. You're not going to put that in the front, it's got to be in an area where there is probably not a whole lot of traffic.

At first it is kind of offensive, like, oh, those cheap guys, they can't mow their lawn.

...dealing with the reality of neighborhoods and how it's going to look and the continuity to the neighborhood.

From a design standpoint getting everybody in, to buy into it in a cohesive fashion and then maintain it is an issue.

I think that the key is the standard of living. I mean that any decently developed urban area, I mean green lawns and things-Woodbury is Woodbury. It would be different if we were living in some small 1000 person town out in the countryside in terms of what a nice green lawn is supposed to look like. I water and don't have any qualms about it because I don't have any alternative. If I want to have nice green grass, you know?

That was my comment from before; we've all been trained to have these manicured putting greens for lawns [*expressing his liking for native plantings*].

Have you received any negative comments about these plantings that you know of? Years ago, when I was still at the University at the time, I had a lot of native plants growing in my yard. That was in the City of River Falls at the time. They went absolutely nuts. They wanted to come out and cut my yard and charge me or bill me or assess me for it because it was unsightly according to the neighbors who all had putting greens for lawns. Even though I was kind of out -though I was somewhat in the country, I was adjacent to two or three others and they did not like my taller plants whether

they flowered or not, they were mostly native species. I just wondered if you have received any negative feedback about those types of plantings.

Keep them neat, you can sell it [*the concept of using native plantings and raingardens*] better that way.

Positive comments and perceptions about the slides of raingardens and native plantings:

I love them, they're low maintenance.

Yeah, that's what I'm thinking. I'm looking for a low maintenance kind of thing.

Seeing all of this stuff for the first time, [slides of plantings] I would say they all look nice with the exception of that last yard looks less nice [*wilder plantings*].

It makes it look like a bit of country in the city [*referring to slides of landscapes and raingardens with native wildflowers*]. We're getting so big and it's changing so much. To be able to drive down your road and see something like that, it keeps you grounded to the country way of life.

These look good [*referring to slides of native plantings*].

In Minneapolis [*as opposed to suburban outlying areas where focus groups took place*] there are a lot more gardens like this. Especially for grades that are like 45 degrees, right up-hill to avoid mowing, like around Lake Harriet.

I think the more trees we leave the less water we're going to use.

Leave the vegetation, that way we are not watering the lawns as much.

Other barriers to or concerns about using raingardens or tracts of native plantings in landscapes identified:

Costs:

a) Added costs:

. We need to work towards it. Put in raingardens, but the money.....

From a development standpoint it becomes a costly attribute [adding native plant landscapes and prairies].

The major residential issues are cost....

The biggest obstacle is always going to be price [*of a prairie project/raingarden, etc.*] vs. maintenance, even when you're underpinning some of the costs [*with grants*].

b) Reduced costs:

What does that [in response to slide of native plantings] do for the watering, is there less watering?

If a homeowner association sees a cut in costs [*to maintain a complex or common area by eliminating mowing in favor of native areas*]...

c) General cost statement:

Like pay me now or pay me later. [*regarding the costs of conservation or not to a community, front end vs. backend*].

Maintenance Concerns:

...getting everybody in [a complex or neighborhood] to buy into it in a cohesive fashion and then maintain it is an issue.

It kind of goes from looking great to looking like a weed bed.

Who maintains the areas in the right of way [*existing boulevard raingarden*] plantings?

It would be interesting to see how these [Burnsville boulevard raingardens] look now [a few years after installation, regarding]-maintenance issues.

...ongoing maintenance of these areas [*planted with native plants*] is going to be an issue. You are going to get some resistance from that. Residences want green only if it is easy and vinyl. They want people to drive by it [*their yard*] and have it look nice and not have to put their backbone into it [*gardening*].

...whether people are willing to do it...

At work we don't have much to work with because we have a lot of blacktop. In the back area, typically we have somebody come in and clear it out because we can't see the highway. It looks out over Hwy. 61, there is a lot of vegetation back there that we don't know what to do with and we might want to do something there. We tend to have it cleared out because it doesn't look very nice.

Going down highway 61, I've noticed some of these plantings that don't look so great. Those raingardens that are not maintained-ponds look bad.

Concerns expressed: weeds, how to know them/get rid of them so plantings don't look weedy.

Habitat for wildlife, lake/pond quality or looks of plantings around ponds:

I walk around the pond at Summit Point Park off of Interlaken and I can see how that water has deteriorated over the years. It's nice to see the wildlife.

My yard is nothing to write home about. It contrasts poorly with the golf course, which is something to write home about. They water a lot more and are very vigilant about keeping the grass and the greens and the fairway perhaps greener than I would keep it. There's this sad little pond in our backyard, not only is it very ugly, but they cut down the grass around it, which I know you're supposed to keep up for filtration and for wildlife. It is an interesting point about the wildlife, but the golfers don't like to dig in it [tall grasses] for their balls. So there is a bit of a conflict there, wildlife and conservation vs. what golfers want.

The water from the storm sewer drains into a pond in part of my backyard. So that was why I came today, to see... It's kind of ugly, but at the same time, it could look nice. So, I was deciding what I could put around it, and thought of you guys.

I'm curious about what the goal is with those types of plantings [regarding slides of native plants]? What I see is: no mowing or very little mowing; there's some benefit to wildlife and third, what does that do for the watering, is there less watering?

See I agree with Justin on these detention ponds and things that are designed to catch the runoff from yards and that type of thing. It's almost like nobody consulted anybody on what should be planted there because some of them look absolutely terrible.

I look at Hammer Park area down here and those ponds years ago looked nice and now they are just green, yucky, slimy, all the phosphates and nitrates they're receiving from runoff from the yards around really changed the quality of those ponds. It changed the aquatic life in them, as well.

Changed it downstream, too.

Mosquitoes and Pest Concerns:

We would need to be careful about the mosquito population [one individual out of three focus groups].

[None listed by the August 7,14, 2008 Cottage Grove group]

Landscaping for water conservation: Regulate, fund, educate?

... has the county enacted any new regulations?

If anyone is aware of what the Kohl's area looked like before it became Kohl's, it was a nice wooded hillside. They made it that nice big flat expanse of asphalt and brick -it would have been nice to have some regulations for them taking away that big sponge that was there and [encouraging Kohl's toward] creating a sponge around that parking area. They had to do that in development, governing that [new construction processes for handling storm water]. I just wondered if they had or the watershed district had any regulations covering that.

I hadn't seen if there were any new regulations that had come out with respect to this.... The county needs to have enacted regulations about new development.

It should be worked into rules and regulations for the city.

Are there city requirements for landscaping?

They did in Eagle Valley, before you do landscaping you need to contact the city.

Water storage issues

They need grants or information on mechanics or design help or plant help: to do these raingardens and plantings:

More time [*at work to deal with landscaping*]!

Grant Availability:

Moderator: what motivating factors do you think would help people to actually want to do this [*install raingardens and native plantings*]?

Participant: Free money!
Free money is good.

Are there grant programs for private citizens?

Does Southern Washington County have grants?

Mechanics , Techniques of Raingarden Installation -concerns:

Do we have a problem with installing all of those raingardens? I don't know how much clay we have in this area? Do we have any clay hard pack in the

areas where these raingardens are that could still be a problem because the water won't penetrate?

One of the questions I have or barriers I would see, when we look at the center parking lots and you want to put these rain gardens maybe around the light poles or where you've got the concrete curbing-does it change the slope of your parking lot? I mean, you want it to take some of the water but not necessarily all of the water. What does that do to the parking lot as far as runoff and where your slopes are?

I live on a hill, would they still want to do a project with me or just with people on the edge of natural areas.

I think from my first understanding of raingardens was that they had to be dug out a lot. So that was one major detail because I had to convince my husband. Apparently, depending on your yard and your soil, it doesn't have to be that deep. So, we didn't have to put a lot-all kinds of work into it.

Control over the look of their personal landscapes:

In this particular project [curbside raingardens], are the plantings dictated to the homeowner?

Native planting and raingarden solutions or comments:

I think rain gardens...we should have more of them.

Motivators: We need to find it attractive.

Make sure they aren't full of weeds.

If there are ways you can do it and have some color, there, I think that is a big thing.

I love them, but I would need a little energy to do it. They're beautiful.

Education or educational institutions:

Educator: When I started, landscaping really didn't exist [*at our school*]. It was more of, "Who's going to take care of all of it?" than anything else. The newer administration feels very strongly like schools need to have some appeal, so we brought in some shrubberies. Some schools have taken the initiative to build gardens; a lot are the Memorial-type gardens that you see. Whether they're rain gardens, versus the other, I'm sure they haven't gone to that extent with things. I know Oldman is doing a **lot** of different things with conservation projects.

Another educator: We've got some movers and shakers down there! They did put in new landscaping in the front. If they knew that grants or opportunities were there for support and help and that you could build them in as projects with kids, I know there are science [*teachers*] and all kinds of teachers that love to have something like that the kids could work on. At some of our other schools we have some parents that are very motivated and have that as their background and they're the ones that are..... Middleton Elementary for example is one of the schools that have done a lot with this one parent they've done a butterfly garden and those kinds of things.

...a lot of it is going to be about education.

Solutions, Observations, Motivators and Suggestions:

You could have your [*WCCD/raingarden/water conservation*] information in a water utility bill stuffer, and they could send out a quarterly [*informative*] letter.

[*Regarding a future project with a school*] I think that in the parking lots where you have most of the runoff, you could have some of the student's put together a landscaping project; they could discuss why it would be good to do it that way.

...suggested park to park, children could have [*view at the park*] a little sketch about conserving water; it goes from the children to the mothers.

And then the other way would be to go to high schools or schools and whatever and then have a challenge to spend less water this year than last year and they have somebody to and maybe I don't know they would do it but to change out the toilets to efficient toilets and that type of thing.

Water storage suggestions:

We should be looking at program sewer designs and so forth and if we had more ways of store(ing) water...

I have no way on a small urban lot to collect water enough that I can do something [about watering lawn]. I mean there isn't another supplemental system that I can tap into.

I was visiting a friend of mine in St. Louis a few years ago, she had a house that was 50 years old at the time [and] I was struck by the fact that she had a cistern in the garden; they started using rain water recapture for their organic gardens.

When I was a kid everyone had a rain barrel or a cistern. Maybe we should bring those back..

I have a rain barrel. This morning when I was using it, someone had said that rain barrels smelled so bad and I thought, "What that guy needs is a little bit of mint beside his rain barrel!" It is made out of a garbage can and has a spigot at the bottom.

Suggestions: Areas of emphasis:

I have a suggestion that maybe in some of these native plant areas, you do sign them, somehow. You go by them and it looks like an unmaintained area, they ought to clean it up. Then, you put a sign on it that says, "Natives" and then [people] say, "Oh, that's neat!"

If there were cute signs, like, "Native Sponge", or "Protecting Your Environment"-it would be good.

There is a sign on one garden. Sign them; you can sell it that way. Everybody would accept that.

This is purely an opinion; commercial developments will be easier to crack than residential. It is much easier to get those types of features into a corporate [setting]; the connotation of being green is good for them [*corporate image*].

A discussion ensued about residential living within communities that have an association and the requirements for planting a certain amount of trees, shrubs, etc. Three people indicated they lived in these communities and suggested that neighborhood associations be approached [*about raingardens/water conservation measures*].

There aren't enough hours in the day to do what I have to do, so if somebody can do it, or I can use some of these companies, great. Now the time I have to spend toward my yard is simply doing what they told me to do.

To get the word out about programs like Blue Thumb or info about water quality improvement or conservation:

Do you involve area realtors so they can send informational things out to new homeowners?

You can get a list of new water hookups [*from the city*]. Then you get an address label and you send out your stuff. That's what we do.

Have you done anything yet to get it out to the public? Like put it in the South Washington Bulletin or? [Moderator indicated that articles appear regularly in the South Washington Bulletin].

She [Moderator] came to our garden club. Everybody was really interested. It was a really good talk. The summer before that Jay Riggs [Executive Director, WCCD] came. They had it at City Hall. They wanted people to come; I did get two council members to come. I guess you really have to push people to come.

How about going to the Chamber of Commerce? Woodbury has speakers, I know and I think Cottage Grove...

Yes, we have one in August. And you can pretty much come as a guest and bring your information and distribute it that day, too and hopefully, have a couple of minutes to talk about it.

Design and planting advice

Recorder: What were some of the other motivating things; I don't want to miss any notes?

Participant: Design [*help*].

Free designs, knowing what plants to plant...the design thing, if you have to hire an engineer....

If somebody could just come out to look at the property and say, "You could do this and this and this, instead of hiring somebody or having somebody who comes out to sell you something.

Just knowing what to plant, what the different options are. If you are going to re-do something, you might have to have a landscape plan to move forward with a project, a building project, or that kind of thing. Well, knowing what are the right things to plant and where to put them would go a long way.

Get others involved:

[This group was eager to suggest names and phone number for future involvement in focus groups, people in the community who might be interested in these projects].

(Named business owner) would like some information; he would be a good one to get involved with this.

And finally:

What are the economic tradeoffs for the community [if we don't do anything]?

My experience suggests self-interest is the key. What excites me, I'll do.
END